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EDUCATION, THE WAR COLLEGES AND PROFESSIONAL MILITARY
DEVELOPMENT

P. T. Karschnia

National War College
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MILITARY DEVELOPMENT

P. T. KARSCHNIA
Captain, USN

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STRATEGIC RESEARCH GROUP
THE NATIONAL WAR COLLEGE

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Abstract

Purpose: To generally assess the role of military education in the professional development of American military leadership and to derive supporting educational theory and construct.

Discussion: Professional military education resides in difficult circumstances. While external challenges from the Congress and the administration appear to constitute the most serious problems, the gravest concerns emanate from within the military establishment. Military education tends to vocationalize and specialize professional development rather than convey broad understanding. The political environment faced by the military generalist is not adequately confronted in the educational system nor is the indeterminacy of future strategic design.

Conclusions: Military educators should combine to assist in the development of a general military professionalism of high ethical and intellectual quality. To achieve this the war and staff colleges must:

- (1) Become institutions where individual disciplines and specialties are subjected to the active criticism of contending disciplines.
- (2) Become teaching institutions to impart professional understanding as opposed to dispensing large quantities of information.
- (3) Achieve a systemic coherence among themselves as a regular part of career development in which the successful military generalist would participate in three war and staff college levels.

The most important component of the defense budget today is manpower and the linchpin of manpower is the professional development of America's future military leaders. Yet professional development is a subject which lacks appeal for most military professionals. It is not of the here and now. It does not concern today's operations, yesterday's policies or tomorrow's promotion and it has nothing to do with the instant ability of an officer to discharge his duty. The existential stuff of modern military life has scant relationship to the idealisms of professional military development through education.

When the American military does look to the future it is primarily in terms of weapons systems rather than military manhood. Perhaps the managerial jargon of weapons system development is required to convey the basic idea. The minds, the attitudes, the myriad individual professional assessments which collectively form the conglomerate of ideas we call strategy represent the "sunk costs" of today's military intellect. The "R&D" of tomorrow's strategy resides in military education. The "lead time" for the development of a competent military generalist is in excess of twenty years. It is time to reassess the "priorities" of military thought concerning weapons systems and professional development and recognize a nearly total preoccupation with the material elements of national security.

Military Education Today

In 1957 Masland and Radway were able to state: "We conclude that military education does make a very substantial contribution to the preparation of officers for policy roles."¹ The nature of the author's caveats to this statement however belies its optimistic tone. As the ranking experts on military education, Masland and Radway forecast impending difficulties regarding jointness, civil-military relationships, conformity to bureaucratic policy goals, managerial methodology vs. intellectual development and the vocational, experiential syndrome which should have forewarned the perceptive reader to the inadequacies of professional military higher education in 1974. But though perception was difficult in 1957 it is doubly difficult today. The fault must rest with the state of scholarship on military professional development and education. This once vital flow has shriveled from the vigorous broad philosophical understandings, typified by the work of Huntington and Masland and Radway, to a sterile dissection treatment. Military scholarship has not filled the gap as it is seemingly out of professional character for a military man to comprehend his education needs.

¹ Masland and Radway, Soldiers and Scholars (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1957), p. 503.

What was known about professional military education in 1957 must now be put into the context of all that has intervened. The ideological determinacy of the Cold War must be replaced by the indeterminacy of Detente. The apolitical image of military professionalism must be succeeded by the reality of a military deeply but ambivalently involved in the governmental process. Public faith or apathy in governmental institutions has been replaced by an active and widespread cynicism, yet the news that the military is now the most admired of American institutions is not good news to any knowledgeable citizen.² American intellectual thought is moving from ideology toward political civility.³ Public reaction to military spending has found a target through Congressional action resulting in a severe contraction in liberal higher education for military officers. And perhaps most important of all, the principal civilian analysts and writers on military affairs have lost interest. The successors to Upton, Luce and Mahan, vainly sought by Masland and Radway in 1957, are now vital to the American future. Unfortunately, we have prepared none!

The contemporary concept of military professionalism and its attendant educational requirements are grossly distorted by the obdurate image of a traditional military professionalism. The traditional apolitical, conservative, ethical, heroic model has been overtaken by all the antithetical forces of political, economic and social life to which the American military has been exposed since 1945. The persistence of the old image complicated by the analytical shortsightedness of the managerial mentality typically confounded by other than direct and measurable linkages, has mistakenly placed the issue of liberal higher education for military officers in the same intellectual context as a weapons system. Regrettably the problem is neither apolitical or quantifiable.

The current trend away from the military generalist towards the specialist is entirely consistent with the deepening American commitment toward ad hoc education and intellectual emasculation. A Congressional

²The Washington Post, May 9, 1974, p. A-1.

³The impoverishment of modern vocabulary described by Edward Shils has led most to believe that civility is mere good manners. This epistemological discontent is related to the escalation of social comprehensions at the expense of the political in all sectors of modern culture. Shils offers the following view on civility. "Civil politics are based on civility, which is the virtue of the citizen, of the man who shares responsibility in his own self-government, either as a governor or as one of the governed. Civility is compatible with other attachments to class, to religion, to profession, but it regulates them out of respect for the common good."

or Department of Defense suggestion that military policy positions be civilianized to avoid the costs of higher education could also be taken to mean a lack of understanding of the modern role of the military professional in government. This is not to suggest that the subject of military professionalism is not well understood by the Congress or the Department of Defense (to include the military services) but that many portentous changes have taken place in the nature of military professionalism and its role in government since last it received serious attention. Professional military education requires broad study and an encompassing philosophical viewpoint as opposed to the dissective treatment which it generally receives today.

A Fundamental Thrust for Military Education

An excellent point of departure regarding the educational needs of the military professional destined for higher responsibility (circa 1959) is provided by Huntington:

The military skill requires a broad background of general culture for its mastery. The methods of organizing and applying violence at any one stage in history are intimately related to the entire cultural pattern of society. Just as law at its borders merges into history, politics, economics, sociology, and psychology, so also does the military skill. Even more, military knowledge also has frontiers on the natural sciences of chemistry, physics, and biology. To understand his trade properly, the officers must have some idea of its relation to these other fields and the ways in which these other areas of knowledge may contribute to his own purposes. In addition, he cannot really develop his analytical skill, insight, imagination, and judgment if he is trained simply in vocational duties. The abilities and habits of mind which he within his professional field can in large part be acquired only through the broader avenues of learning outside his profession. The fact that, like the lawyer and the physician, he is continuously dealing with human beings requires him to have the deeper understanding of human attitudes, motivations, and behavior which a liberal education stimulates. Just as a general education has become the prerequisite for entry into the professions of law and medicine, it is now also almost universally recognized as a desirable qualification for the professional officer.⁴

Huntington, The Soldier and the State (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 1959), p. 14.

This is a statement of goals for the education of generalists made before the scholars of military professionalism were aware of the unprecedented political responsibilities which would accrue to the military during the remainder of the Cold War, the Vietnam War and its aftermath. More importantly, it is a statement made before the now emerging changes to political thought currently taking form in the transition from ideology to civility.⁵ Detente cannot be comprehended from a lesser philosophical plane.

The undeniable trend in professional military development since 1945 and for that matter throughout all areas of American society has been the disintegration of whole man into specialized bits. The kind of military professional described by Huntington scarcely exists, having been transcended by the managerial specialist. The truth of this statement is borne out in the heroic efforts of most senior war colleges to reconstitute whole man under a curriculum which attempts to convey the totality of western culture in ten short months. If the objective is to gain understanding, this is an impossible task and was so even prior to an appreciation of the military role in the Civil-Military Environment and indeed before the era of indeterminacy and the emergence of civility.⁶

It is said that American higher education has become a quasi-public utility. It tends to be ad hoc, vocational and methodologically splintered as a mirror of a rapidly changing technology and complex society. In the sense that higher education is a futuristic endeavor ad hoc education is always eventually wrong. It is an investment in the past. The speed with which obsolescence overtakes is conditioned by the rate of change within society. Thus,

. . .the most practical education in the advanced industrial countries is the most theoretical one, so it may turn out that in those countries an educational system that aims at understanding will make the most impressive contribution to power and prosperity, whereas one that aims at power and prosperity will fail in that ambition, and fail as well to bring about understanding.⁷ (emphasis added)

⁵For a full explanation see The Intellectuals and the Powers and Other Essays by Edward Shils (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1972), pp. 42-70.

⁶See P. T. Karschnia, The Civil-Military Environment: A Study of Military Professionalism and Ethics (Washington, D.C.: The National War College, 1974) for a description of the military role in government.

⁷Robert Hutchins, The Learning Society (New York: Frederic A. Praeger, 1968), p. 37.

Theoretical education will always be right because it is built upon the realization that the aim of education is the development of "mannood" as opposed to specialized "manpower" and that "Information is not education. Education is what remains after the information that has been taught has been forgotten."⁸

These are precisely the issues which the military educational theorist must confront and if fairly considered will result in a rebirth of liberal educational patterns for the professional development of America's military generalists. The educational development of military generalists has been largely subordinated to the overwhelming attractions of professional specialization.

Generalists and Specialists

It is at this juncture that the military educational theorist must feel some compulsion to differentiate between generalists and specialists. The distinction is of particular importance for the generalists will assuredly inherit the mantle of top military leadership. To be certain, the growing importance of specialization has been matched by commensurate increases in rank and authority, however, generalists will continue to control the armed forces. While professional development takes shape in these two primary career streams the distinction between generalists and specialists defies easy definition.

For instance, most line officers in the Navy consider themselves generalists. In reality, many have become specialized early in service limiting their cognition of broad naval and national policy matters and concurrently working for senior sponsors who are themselves more specialist than generalist. The specialist/generalist distinction is a subtle difference which is usually least well expressed by the intricately constructed specialty or subspecialty system employed by the services. For example: the subspecialty career patterns contemplated by the Navy for Politico-Military Strategic Planning are in reality the proving ground for the next generation of generalists while those by contrast in the subspecialty of Electronic Engineering are indeed specialized.

Perhaps the greatest anguish to be confronted by the educational theorist involves the question of who is to receive the liberal education and who the specialized variety. Who is to lead and who is to follow? While natural attrition helps to some degree this is an important ethical question which may never be equitably resolved.

⁸Ibid., p. 38.

Irresolution of the issue however should not stand in the way of making a decision to execute the ruthless but essential judgements which separate people and subject matter. While the notes compiled by George Marshall in his early career, concerning the fitness of his contemporaries and juniors would not conform to contemporary standards of equity used in promotions, they served admirably to identify a competent, expanded wartime leadership.

Basic Objectives

The fundamental theme for the education of the military generalist is the development of manhood. The concept of manhood might be most easily understood by comparing it to manpower. Manhood involves the development of all facets of being while manpower is simply the expression of obedient technical skill. The distinction between manhood in general and military manhood is real. The popular conception of difference deals with physical heroism, however the self-conscious suppression of individualism, involving a special sense of self-discipline is perhaps the most important distinction. Military manhood is a personal quality which combines ethical and intellectual considerations as well as physical attributes. It's relation to sex is primarily semantic, although heavily constrained by culture. Military manhood is perhaps never completely achieved, as it is typified by accretion and changes of emphasis throughout the educational career of the generalist. The cant toward the physical qualities in the early years must later succumb to the requirements of civility forcing an amalgam of the ethical and intellectual sphere into a single professional consistency.

The basis for military manpower is training and knowing, while military manhood is sought through education and understanding. The education of the military generalist has four basic objectives.

The generalist must understand the nature of his immediate military profession as an Army, Navy, Air Force or Marine Officer, conquering intellectual subdivisions of intra-service modularity.

The generalist must understand the nature of the community of military professions contending with the disciplinary dispersion of land, sea and air doctrines.

The generalist must understand the complex nature of the civil-military environment and the delicate practice of political civility as governor and governed. This is professional civility.

The generalist must understand the nature of foreign affairs as they affect the national interests of America.

Robert Hutchins would undoubtedly characterize the aforementioned goals for professional education as a blueprint for vocational education. Clark Kerr, Chairman and Executive Director of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, might fault it for an undue preoccupation with classical considerations. These goals are in fact some place between the two positions but considerably closer to the classical model than existing educational programs for generalists. The goals are vocational only in the sense that they are directed toward the American military profession preparing for an indeterminate strategic destiny in a politicized environment.

A comparison of the goals for the liberal education of generalists with existing programs reveals huge differences in perspective. Existing programs excel at foreign affairs but convey little of military professionalism beyond the service orientation and almost no conceptual understanding of government, nation and military manhood.

The accomplishment of the goals for a liberal education of generalists requires an approach which represents a regularization and a quantum increase in the academic nature of their educational experience. As such it involves a series of educational exposures utilizing the entire spectrum of military higher education.

An Encompassing View of Educational Responsibility

The early development of manhood is the fundamental task of the service academies and universities who educate future military officers. One cannot escape the thought that the nature of military manhood may be misrepresented at the academies and not represented with positive effect by the ROTC's. Both types of educational experience require a good deal more thought with respect to the intellectual and ethical qualities of military manhood as opposed to its physical attributes. It is a mistake to leave the development of military manhood at the day of commission as it involves situational differences which occur throughout the career. Succeeding educational experiences must also maintain this abiding theme in addition to other objectives.

The remainder of the slightly more vocational but entirely theoretical understandings of the military generalist can be accomplished in succeeding war and staff college tours and fully funded post-graduate education in Philosophy, History, Literature, Political Philosophy and discriminate study in the social and physical sciences. The question of whether academic degrees are earned is irrelevant to the essential goal of achieving a theoretical understanding of profession, government, nation and foreign affairs.

It is against these general understandings that the future of military education and the senior war colleges will be assessed.

The Senior War Colleges Adrift

The senior war colleges are part of a picture within a picture. To be understood, the war colleges must be viewed in the larger context of military professional development, from first day as a plebe or a doolie to career's end, and then again in next larger context which is the essential nature of military professional life in the service of America. This larger picture is the civil-military environment.

The analogy of a picture within a picture is crucial, for as the systems analyst removes and inspects each of the parts it loses meaning and assumes the identity of a system unto itself. Thus denuded of relevance to broader understandings and subtle linkages within the American political culture, higher military education must face its challengers as a direct and causal link between dollars spent and an easily demonstrable payoff for national security. This analytical folly proceeds in serene oblivion to the essential nature of education. The mind is not some sort of a hopper and the benefits of education are seldom direct.

It is unfortunate but true that the most prominent way of viewing war colleges is as an isolated educational interlude as opposed to part of a larger educational experience. Beyond the faddist attractions of systemic appraisal there is immense justification for doing just so. The previously described picture within a picture is horribly confused and nearly incomprehensible in its complexity. The shambles stem from a general lack of cognition of the changed nature and role of the military profession in America. It is further complicated by a jangle of contending professionalisms within each military service and among the services. The picture is festooned with the differing and contradictory educational policies of each of the services while the joint colleges reside in uneasy disconnect as the final overlay. In summary, the picture is an excellent portrayal of the greatest weakness of the American military--an extreme lack of community.

The Military Services and Educational Community

A highly cohesive military community is a totally unsound political premise for America. Yet the present state of affairs is an extreme in the opposite direction. A reasonable state of military community, consistent with a democratic system of government, can be found somewhere between the extremes of militaristic monism and doctrinal anarchy.

The achievement of a reasonable middle ground where a responsible military community might function is the bailiwick of the senior military policymakers and operational leaders yet they are critically constrained by bureaucratic and political factors. Despite the most heroic intentions and action on the part of these leaders the prospect for change is marginal. The military educators, by contrast, have the potential for massive leverage on the future of the military community. The policymakers and the operators can change organizational forms and emphasis but the educator deals in the most important component of change--attitudes. The military educators should become the combined agents of the service leaders to build a system of professional development which is suitable to the American way in an era of indeterminacy.

The first step is to objectively comprehend the abiding nature of American military politics. Events since World War II have created a kind of political psychosis in which each of the military services views itself in an embattled position which if not forcefully defended will result in total encroachment by the other services or defense agencies. This outlook has colored all joint military activities to the point where the single most important truth concerning military politics has been obscured.

The separate military services are the central and abiding military elements in American political and social life. The individual services as traditional parts of the political system serve two purposes in their plural identities. These purposes are a matter of innate political understanding to seasoned politicians. First, the separate services impede strategic monism. The paths of history are strewn with the bones of nations who succumbed to the attractions of a single military voice. Secondly, the diffusion of power represented by separate and contending military services is a crucial political element for controlling a large military establishment. Any major change to the existing political balance among the services is extremely unlikely, yet the possibility appears to unduly burden the attitudes of military man.

It follows that other apparently competing organizational entities such as the functional DOD agencies, the joint system and the Unified Command Structure are secondary in political importance and perhaps transitory in the long run. The bedrock is the individual military services. Educational policy and the quest for a reasonable expression of military community must spring from that understanding.

Educational policy must stem primarily from the services in some sort of a self-contained consistency, but which through the wisdom of its principles avidly supports the crucial need for joint doctrinal and political education. In this very realistic perception of the services as institutions of enduring strength, joint education is nothing more than a necessary extension of that strength. It is not a competing force.

The educational task faced by the services is to utilize the totality of educational opportunity from the academies and ROTC's through the senior war colleges in the preparation of future leaders for higher responsibility. The Army has perhaps done the most in this regard and the Navy is in the process of reformulating educational policy. None of the services however have confronted the educational task in the totality which is required for the education of the generalist destined for high responsibility in the civil-military environment.

Necessary Changes

Three things are required of the war and staff colleges in order to adequately educate the military generalist.

1. They must become universities in an intellectual sense.
2. They must become teaching institutions, imparting understanding rather than simply disseminating information.
3. The war and staff colleges must achieve a systemic coherence among themselves as a regular part of career development.

To Be A University

The aim of the university is

. . .to tame the pretensions and excesses of experts and specialists by drawing them into the academic circles and subjecting them to the criticism of other disciplines. Everything in the university is to be seen in the light of everything else. This is not merely for the sake of society or to preserve the unity of the university. It is also for the sake of the specialists and experts, who, without the light shed by others, may find their own studies going down blind alleys.⁹

The parallel between the taming of specialties and the creation of a service-oriented military professionalism and a larger military community is striking. It must be understood however that the theory of the university is seldom as successful in practice as visualized in concept. The natural bars to unity will serve as the necessary constraint to the evolution of a monistic military theory.

⁹Ibid., p. 108.

To Impart Understanding

The Naval War College is the best current example of a military institution which attempts to impart understanding as opposed to dispensing great doses of information. The method employed is maieutic--a kind of dialectical intellectual midwifery used by Socrates to help his students gain understanding. Its most common modern application aside from a few good graduate schools is found in psycho-analytical technique in which the patient (or in this case, the student) is able to achieve cognition of complex truths concerning the world about him. The pedantic investment is considerably greater than that represented by the usual war or staff college guest speaker program.

It involves instead a teaching faculty, a high level of student motivation and application, a working teacher/student relationship and also an extended exposure to selected guest lecturers. The application of this technique requires the rare quality of intellectual courage as the educational theorist must make ruthless judgements regarding subject matter. He can never feel the security of the military educator who sponsors a broadly inclusive curriculum but he can know that more than a few of his students understand what was presented in sufficient theoretical depth to carry the lesson to a myriad of associated applications throughout the remainder of their military careers.

To Achieve Systemic Coherence

The final step is the most difficult as it involves the mutual confidence of military leaders in a combined system of general military education. The experienced observers of joint affairs, whose wisdom is solidly grounded in the pragmatism of past performance, will understandably predict that the concept of an extended and combined professional education can never survive the shoals of interservice competition. The prescience of this view is related to better days. It does not comprehend the significance of the disappearance of the US Armed Forces Institute (USAFI) with the stroke of a Congressional pen or the recent 20 percent reduction in fully funded postgraduate study. More importantly, it does not yet see the emerging evidence of an intellectual alienation between higher education and military education in America. The fissure will not be ideological or antimilitary but simply that the highly vocationalized military concepts of education will fall far afield from the current thrust toward a rejuvenation of classical education and theoretical understanding in America. The seers of joint affairs are correct for the present but as the screw tightens the imperative for a combined military approach will lose its incredible quality. It is well then to exposit a general view of a common good for war and staff college education with an expectation of responsible discourse on the matter.

The existing institutional organization of the service war and staff colleges is the basis for an extended liberal professional education. Each of the services (less the Marine Corps) sponsors two levels of higher professional education. There is considerable diversity in the educational policies of the services regarding the progressive application of the junior and senior schools which should be regularized to reflect the general professional need for two levels of service-sponsored higher professional education.

As a matter of future design, the junior or staff course ought to be devoted to further understandings of service professionalism, i.e., the development of a cohesive professional understanding within each service, bringing subprofessional doctrines into contention in a maieutic environment. Further understandings of military manhood and a few basic concepts of professional civility should also be introduced in the junior course. While the emphasis is upon education, some training in organizational forms may be necessary to achieve a common frame of reference.

The senior service war colleges should maintain the theme of military manhood and increase the emphasis upon professional civility. The subject matter might include a senior viewpoint of service professionalism, an understanding of the civil-military environment, a theoretical survey of the doctrinal problems of the larger military community and an introduction to foreign affairs.

The Role of Joint Education

Joint war college education has been plagued by misconception and unnecessary conflict. It should reflect no more or no less than the extension of service educational needs beyond service professionalism into a third level of higher professional education.

The Armed Forces Staff College provides a specialized form of joint professional development at the junior service college level. While the concept is generally constructive to military professional development, its application has been necessarily haphazard in that only a limited number of generalists can attend. The resources of this institution ought to be diverted to the service war colleges or the senior joint war colleges to achieve the necessary educational continuity required for the military generalist.

The lesson of the Naval War College is crucial to the future of the joint senior war colleges. That lesson is that the combined resources of two educational endeavors, with significant areas of similarity, can support a single teaching faculty serving both. This organizational spin-off

can also be used in the creation of the true university; a place where disciplines contend. It is suggested that the National War College and the Industrial College of the Armed Forces be united in a university structure for the limited purpose of combined faculty efforts in areas of curriculum similarity. The Industrial College admittedly faces a far different task than the National War College with regard to the preparation of generalists, yet there are areas of broad mutual interest.

The National War College ought to be an extension of the services finest professional accomplishment--a third and culminating educational experience for military generalists who have or are about to become general and flag officers. Needless to say, the same general criterion should apply to the participating civilian components of government. The curriculum should be comprised of a broad view of professional civility to encompass all defense-related sectors of government, a continuation of joint doctrinal studies and extensive application in foreign affairs.

Who Shall Lead?

The construct presented is far from radical. Parts of it are already in operation. Most of it is readily attainable if cogently presented and communally supported. All of it has left the pens or crossed the minds of those interested in military education. The greatest problem then, is that those who see the value of a combined and extended military educational system will for fully understandable reasons, do nothing. Perhaps in that sense, military educators are in the same position as the educational leaders of America.

It is difficult to repress the thought that unless the values of our society are either preserved (Hutchins) or constantly reconstructed (Dewey) as guides to behavior, including economic behavior, then the whole edifice is doomed to collapse. The leaders of church and government appear to be either unqualified or disqualified for such a task. Will educational leaders, such as the Commission, be content only to describe the situation even as it disintegrates?¹⁰

It is a question of who is most able to accomplish the task. The educators are the fittest and they must cause the head to lead the heart.

¹⁰From a letter written by Raymond P. Whitfield, Dean of Graduate Studies, Eastern Washington State College, concerning the controversy surrounding the report and recommendations of the Carnegie Commission on Higher Education. For a full reprint see The Center Magazine, Vol. VI. Number 6, Nov/Dec 1973, pp. 48-49.